



Northwest Regional Office

NOAA Fisheries



National Marine Fisheries Service

News Release

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NOAA Fisheries Accepts Petition to List Puget Sound Herring under the Federal Endangered Species Act, Will Embark on Extensive Study

NOAA Fisheries, the federal agency charged with protecting marine fishes under the Endangered Species Act, said today it was formally accepting a petition to list Cherry Point herring in Washington's Puget Sound under that federal law.

While accepting a petition doesn't in any way guarantee that a species will eventually be listed under the ESA, it is the first step in that process.

Ironically, a January petition from the same group to list Cherry Point herring was about to be rejected because it didn't contain sufficient information on which the agency could make a judgment. The new petition, received by the agency in mid-May, has additional information, especially about the genetic aspect of the Cherry Point stock and other nearby herring stocks, that the agency found sufficient to initiate a new status review.

Although the size of the Cherry Point stock has more than doubled in the past four years and is at its highest level since 1996, fishery biologists say it is still at only about half the level needed to sustain a commercial fishery. The scientist noted, however, that a stock too small to be harvested doesn't necessarily mean that it warrants ESA protection.

NOAA Fisheries will now embark on a more thorough study and status review of the stock, convening a special team of biologists and herring experts to determine if it warrants protection under the ESA. The agency would have to make any formal proposal to list the stock by May 2005. A final determination, if one is warranted, could occur a year later.

The petitioners are Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Ocean Advocates, People for Puget Sound, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Sam Wright, and Friends of the San Juans.

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